When I became the second Executive Director of the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) in the mid-1990s, I saw a real opportunity in the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM). I believed the TAM to be a wonderful resource for the community that was much more visible and tangible than the concept of land conservation, which was the primary focus of the board at the time. I lobbied hard to place more focus on development of the TAM and fortunately was able to garner the support of the board to put more resources into the Trail.

One key piece of land in this phase of development of the TAM came to be known as Wright Park. In the late 1980’s, local resident Will Jackson had generously donated the land to the town of Middlebury. (Will gave it the name in honor of his dear friend Chuck Wright, who had been paralyzed in a plane crash.) What many people don’t know is that despite Will’s wonderful offer, the town might not have accepted the gift unless MALT Board Member Peg Martin became a strong advocate and convinced the town select board to take it. So, we have both Will and Peg to thank for the wonderful resource we all now enjoy as an integral part of the TAM.

Once the town became the owner of this land, local resident (and reliable volunteer) Al Stiles played a huge role in laying out the first trails in the park. Over the ensuing years, Wright Park has become one of my favorite parts of the TAM, and you will often find me there in all seasons for hiking, cross-country skiing, and sometimes mountain biking. If you have yet to visit this amazing part of our town, you are in for an eye-opening experience in a striking area. Wright Park has a variety of well-marked hiking trails, several of which take you right past natural features that you’d never expect to see in a place so close to downtown.

One trail goes for quite some distance along the remote shore of Otter Creek, a stretch of the river that invokes a sense of being in a much larger wilderness area. You’ll see tons of evidence of beaver activity, and ospreys can often be sighted. Another trail follows along a series of rocky cliffs, several of which are 50-60 feet high; bird life and animal signs are abundant everywhere. Mountain bikers also have access to this territory — on trails specifically designed for bike use, making it a popular multi-use segment of the TAM.

As I look back over my years as Executive Director of MALT, the things I remember most fondly are the teamwork and volunteerism that finally got the whole trail in place. No one would be able to enjoy the TAM as it is now without, for example, the efforts of John Derick, who continues today to be the driving force behind maintaining the TAM’s system of trails and bridges. And the early involvement of Will Jackson, Peg Martin, Al Stiles, and many others was pivotal as well. So, if you see any of them on the street, extend your hand and thank them!

Contributed by Bud Reed
MALT’s second Executive Director, 1995-2000

Factoid
Trail Section: Wright Park
Distance: 2.8 miles
Trail Heads: Seymour St. Ext. or Belden Falls Rd.
Features: Stretches along Otter Creek River to Belden Falls and along cliffs and deep woods.

Community Hike to explore this section of the TAM on Saturday, March 22

Trail Around Middlebury – our ‘Emerald Necklace’

This column is the second in a series dedicated to educating and engaging the community on the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM), its history and varied routes. It is also part of MALT’s campaign to raise an endowment for the TAM’s exciting future.

We encourage you to walk any section of this remarkable, local jewel and contribute to MALT’s trail endowment campaign. See you on the TAM!

For more info on the TAM or the Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT) call 802.388.1007 or visit maltvt.org